



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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Statement

By

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Ethiopia's Millennium Celebrations

11-12 September, 2007

Addis Ababa, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia



[FORMAL GREETINGS]

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to join the rest of the world in Addis Ababa to wish the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia a happy new year. I am doubly pleased to be in Ethiopia this year, as part of your historic Millennium celebrations.

Ethiopia's Y2K comes seven and a half years after the Western world's millennium, but this discrepancy is due not to lethargy, but to the inimitable idiosyncrasies of the ancient and magnificent Ethiopian civilization. In the year 500AD, the Roman Church decided to amend its calculation of the date of Jesus Christ's death, moving it back a few years. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church disagreed, and kept the original date. As the second-oldest Christian nation in the world, and reputed home of the Ark of the Covenant, Ethiopia – more than any other nation – has earned the right to disregard the Roman Church's new accounting.

Indeed, this unrivaled historical perspective is part of what makes Ethiopia such a compelling nation. She stands proudly as the cradle of humanity, site of some of the earliest human remains yet discovered by archeologists. She is one of the oldest nations in the world, has historical records dating back over 3,000 years, and her rock-hewn churches at Lalibela are an awe-inspiring testimony to the power of ancient Christian devotion. Not to be outdone, the city of Harar is the fourth holiest city in Islam, and is home to stunning mosques that have been standing since the 10th century. The depth and diversity of the glorious Ethiopian civilization cannot be disputed or denied.

Ethiopia's peerless position as one of the world's greatest civilizations has always held particular resonance for the peoples of the Caribbean. To many in our Caribbean civilization, Ethiopia is the storied birthplace of mankind and the spiritual, ideological and inspirational homeland of all Africans who were scattered throughout the world through the twin evils of a genocidal slave trade and an exploitative colonial greed. Indeed, the hundreds of Caribbean-born Rastafarians in Shashamane are physical manifestations of what, for millions of Caribbean people, is an existential connection to this country. In this year, the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, we take special comfort in the fact that this proud and magnificent nation was never successfully colonized by the Europeans.

We in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have actively embraced and operationalized our people's emotional attachment to Ethiopia. On 16th February 2004, I made my first trip to Ethiopia to establish diplomatic relations between our countries. A mere twenty months later, our Prime Minister, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, visited Ethiopia and signed an historic visa abolition agreement with Prime Minister Ato Meles Zenawi. My presence here today – the third official visit by our tiny nation in three years – is further testament to the powerful kinship between Ethiopia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Indeed, as I speak to you today, Vincentian Rastafarians and Pan Africanists – many of whom have never set foot in your country – are also celebrating the Ethiopian Millennium with our own unique Caribbean flair.

Millennial celebrations, by their very nature, celebrate the past while simultaneously casting a hopeful eye to the future. In this respect, we Vincentians share the immense pride of the Ethiopian people in confidently forecasting the dawn of a brilliant new day in your country and continent. The spectacular events surrounding these celebrations epitomize a new capability and ethos among the Ethiopian people, and serve to finally explode the western world's myths and misconceptions about this great nation. Ethiopia, most assuredly, is not a nation of starvation, war and poverty. She is a productive nation, with burgeoning tourism, livestock and coffee industries. She is a proud nation, with unique cultural and historical offerings, ranging from culinary delicacies to ancient manuscripts. She is a strong, yet peaceful, nation, the common home to millions of devout and peace-loving Christians and Muslims. And she is an inspirational

nation, a pillar of strength within Africa, and a beacon of hope to displaced Africans the world over.

As this “New Ethiopia” – born of a magnificent civilization, forged in a turbulent past and embracing a glorious future – opens her doors in welcome to the world; St. Vincent and the Grenadines wishes to extend our most sincere and heartfelt congratulations to the Government and people of this great nation for your tremendous accomplishments. We look forward with great anticipation to deeper cooperation between our countries; to increased cultural and economic exchanges; and to greater individual and personal contacts between our peoples.

It is fitting that the tenacious adherence to an ancient calendar has produced this exclusively Ethiopian New Year. A country as unique as Ethiopia deserves the right to dominate the world’s attention and imagination on this very special occasion, without competing with the glitzy, yet often soulless, Millennium celebrations of seven years ago. With the international focus squarely and solely on Ethiopia, the world joins you in celebrating this magnificent day.

Happy New Year, Ethiopia! We in St. Vincent and the Grenadines wish you another 2,000 happy new years to come.

I thank you.